

**WORK  
HARD**

**&  
BE NICE  
TO PEOPLE**



**OIL &  
WATER  
DO NOT  
MIX**

GULF OF MEXICO - 2010

*Come in* We're  
**CLOSED**  
**OPEN** *Sorry We're*

ANTHONY BURRILL

**JOY  
IN  
LIFE**





# Letterpress



## ***You Have The Answer*** **Anthony Burrill**

*'Graphic artist Anthony Burrill combines a knack for simplicity that packs a punch with analogue craft skills and powerful, positive messages . . . pushing his traditional discipline of choice, letterpress printing, into bold new territories.'*

Large monochromatic A1 screen-prints made from original wooden typesetting, accompanied by a mural spanning an entire wall of the Jealous Gallery in Shoreditch, 2022.

*'The key part of the work is the ampersand. It represents the glue that holds our relationships together. The 'and' in you & me. It's this connection that makes every human interaction important. The prints and mural in the exhibition take the form of the ampersand, in this case the same type that was used in the Leeds mural, and creates abstract patterns using a repeat and rotation of the letterform. The interlocked shapes remind us of how we are linked with other people. How those alliances are interdependent and shape the fabric of our lives.*

Anthony Burrill, 2022

Combining letterpress, and thence screen printing and murals, Anthony creates pieces that transcend their original form. He demonstrates Adhocism in his approach to his work, allowing the imperfections of letterpress to travel from a small galley of wooden type to the side of a building. They evolve from letters set on an baseline to entities that interact, echoing human emotion and relationships, whilst creating new abstract shapes.

He simulatenously challenges the conventions of letterpress using scale and placement, whilst amplifying its playbill-like tone of voice staying is true to its roots.

## ***Why?***

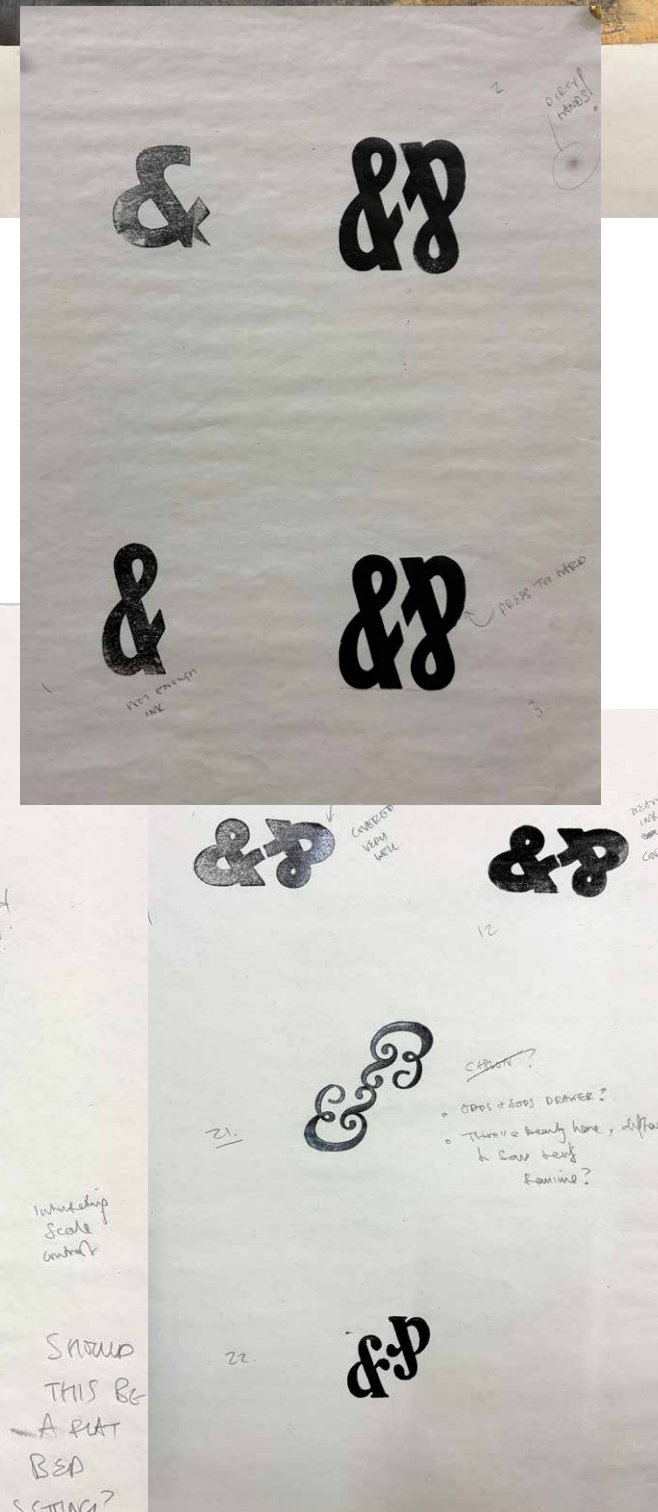
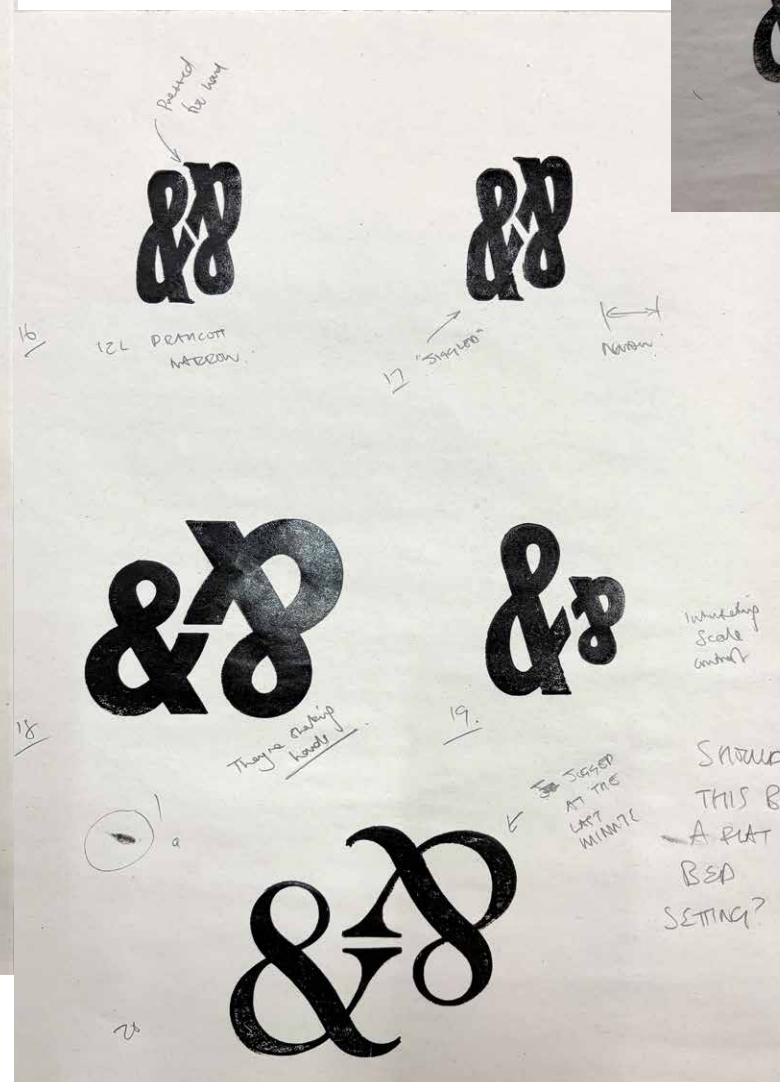
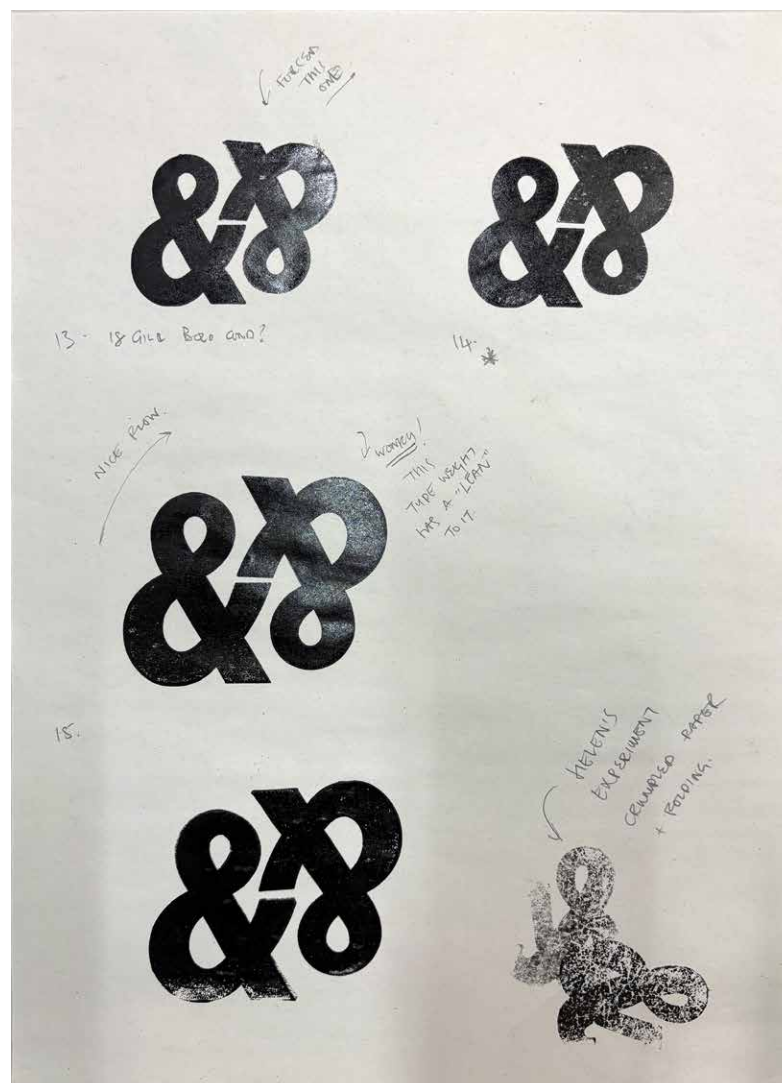
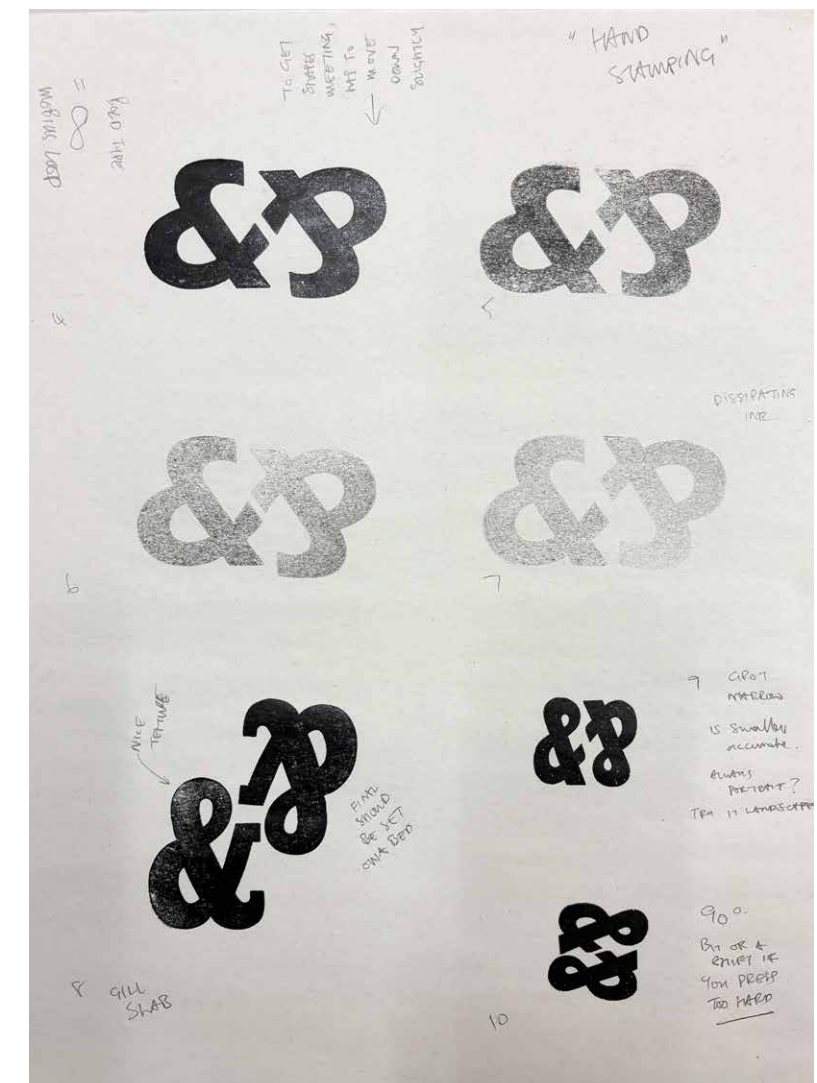
- Never used woodblock type
- Relatively quick introduction
- Iterations not too labour intensive
- Interested in personification of the type
- Love the simplicity of AB's work

[anthonyburrill.com](http://anthonyburrill.com)



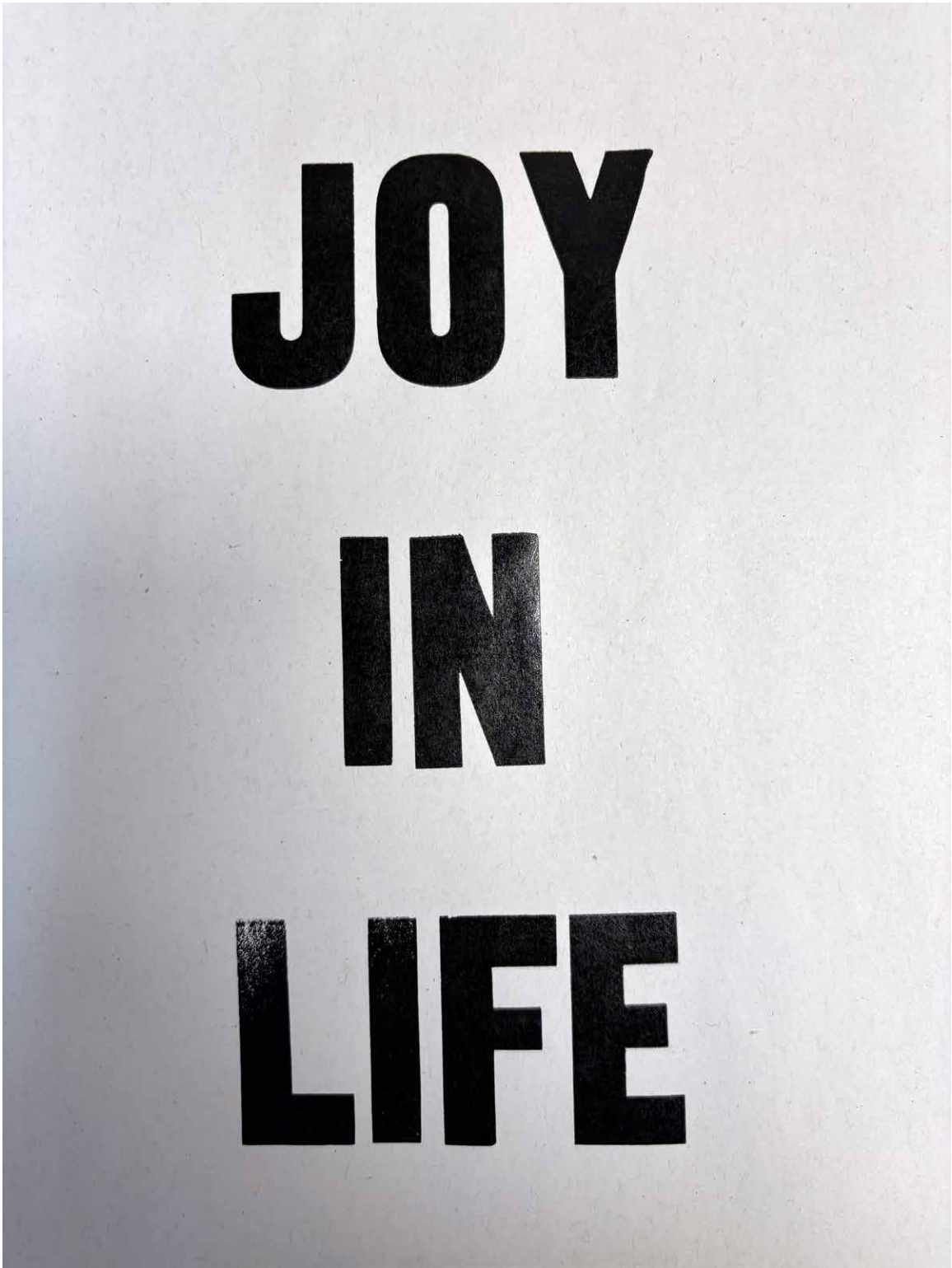


## Hand stamping

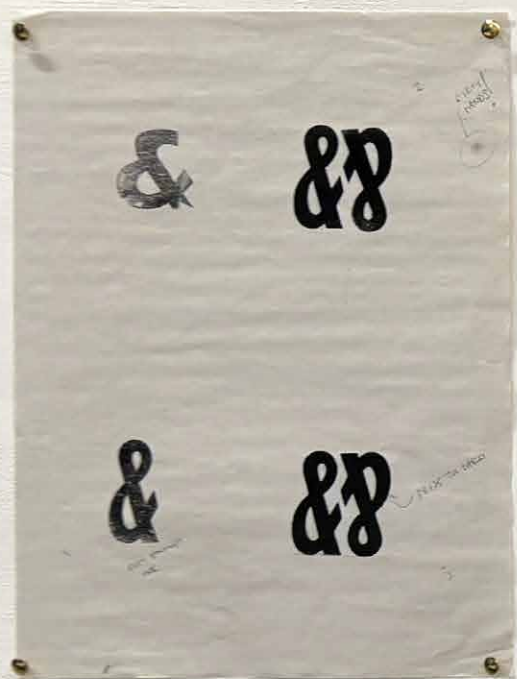




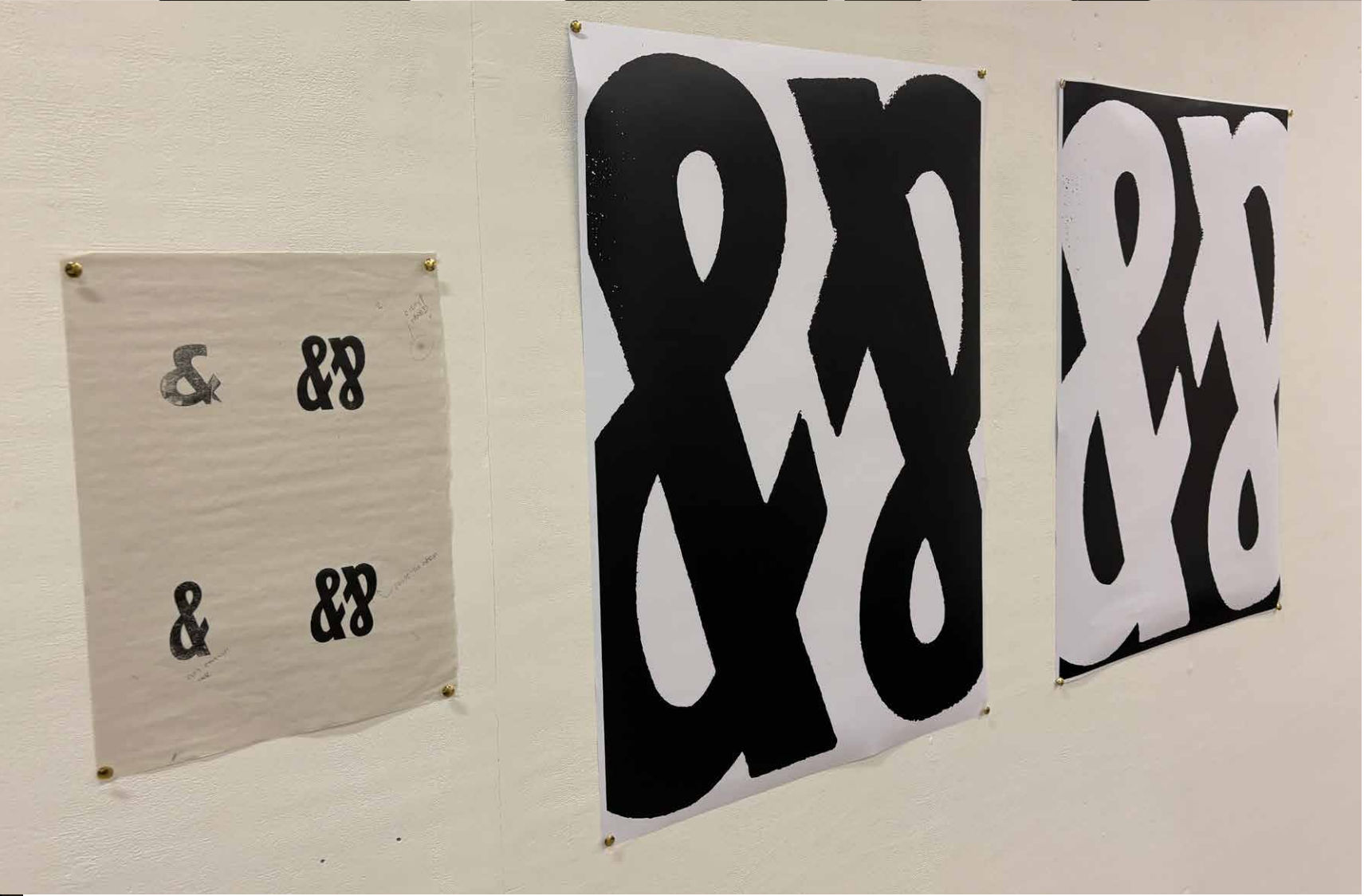
Typesetting











# Observing

## *What's unexpected about this thing you just made?*

- Different experience entirely to typesetting in a digital space.

- Speed. Slow to execute, be that the hand stamp or metal type setting.

- Decision-making feels substantial and instinctive because of the slow pace.

- Tactile, mindful quality to the act of hand stamping and also typesetting for a press.

- Woodtype **hand stamping is much more free than typesetting** on a galley/press bed.

- Meticulous quality to the type-setting on a galley, maths involved, measuring. Its steady and there's planning. Does this threaten the unexpected or does it allow for accidents? No automatic settings for kerning/leading.

- Scale - generally working small, I was surprised by how small the type goes. I know you can get wooden type that's big, but AB takes this idea and blows it up and up!

- By blowing up to an A1 print, there is a transition going on but it preserves its base characteristics.

- **Magnifying imperfections.** Detail comes out when blown up. Even though there is touching up (I have commissioned AB and there is a digital layer there before screenprinting and displaying in a physical space), and even when type is SET rather than hand stamped, with exact placement and uniform coverage, there is still a hidden, random landscape at the edges of the letterforms.

- Cropping the ampersands at A1 created a focal point in the centre of the artwork.

- Hand stamping allowed me to experiment intuitively with scale, style, position. I don't get that same sense digitally.

- I tended to step back physically, step in to look closely, felt close to the substance of the ink and paper.

- It's physically quite draining. There is a lot of mess and cleaning.

- 16pt GIL Sans condensed good for this copy.

- White space is important

## *What do you understand better or differently about your tool or medium now?*

- The physicality of it. Previously, I only considered its outcome and visual presence/communication, not how it came to be or what was behind it.

- You can't be nimble and quick, which you may as well surrender to.

- Feels so natural in monotone within this experiment, but what could come from adding colour?

- White space is important.

- Time is important.

- Sense of security when working digitally, not here.

## *Did it pose a particular technical challenge?*

### HAND STAMPING

- Pressure, too much is bad

- Accuracy, obviously without setting on a galley and press bed, it won't adhere to any baseline or typographic rules

- Paper stock. At this initial experimental stage, only newsprint used. I am guessing there could be issues with paper, pressure etc in the next stage.

### METAL TYPE SETTING

- Physical impact, correct posture.

- Quality of attention to detail, easy to cut corners given digital background

- Maths.

### TIME

- It takes a day to dry.

- Time to prep.

- Allow time for iteration, there has to be a physical proof for you to spot a mistake and then remedy with another proof.

### CLEANING UP

- Because of the amount of cleaning up, it focusses your choices.

- Pressure on the block (hand stamping). Helen did a simple rocking motion, singly, without much pressure. I was pushing and pushing and it affected the result.

## *What kind of output or knowledge does this tool or medium favour?*

- It is suited to simple, direct communication. True to its playbill roots.

- Typesetting (moveable type) works well with linear planning and iterative execution in a controlled way, yet it allows for imperfections to come through. Use of repeated proofs.

- Hand stamping is suited to more energetic, experimental way of working, welcoming mistakes and randomness and can invite a flow state in the creator. Unexpected combinations occur more readily.

- Sans serif has more force and substance, judging by this experience. When I started experimenting with a serif ampersand, it became a much more ornate exercise, I was arranging more carefully, appreciating the curves.

- It favours scale.

- It favours simple, contrasting colour palettes.

- It uses white space well.

- It favours simpler, shorter messaging in this instance.

- It favours the vertical, woodtype and posters seem to go hand in hand.

## *What relationship does it have to graphic or communication design?*

Letterpress came from simple, economic communication in print at a generally small scale.

It can transcend that but keep its core characteristics of direct messaging.

In a visually noisy world, it both preserves its history but carves out much needed white space where simple, positive messages can sit unpolluted.

**Anthony Burrill's connection between combining letterforms as a reminder of human interdependency invites us to consider what positive effect letterpress can have on bringing people together in a social context.**



# Written response: proposal

*You Have The Answer* by Anthony Burrill combines type to ‘remind us of how we are linked with other people. How those alliances are interdependent and shape the fabric of our lives’. His process of letterpress, screenprint and mural shout louder with every iteration. The increasing scale and crop make the viewer focus on *how* his ampersands meet. They almost touch, personifying the type and we read our human relationships *into* the letterforms. In this way he is creating typographic pieces in the form of ‘Adhocism’, as coined by Jencks and Silver, who claimed that “all creations are initially ad hoc combinations of past subsystems” (Jencks and Silver, 1972).

Copying Anthony Burrill’s *typesetting* process showed me that it is about planning and executing an outcome using a controlled method to create reproductions. Though imperfections happen, the result is deliberate, strong, purposeful. Hand stamping the ampersands showed me something different, but still using the same tool. Minimal planning with instinctive execution brought myriad imperfections and a free-flow state, making me feel closer to the unexpected results.

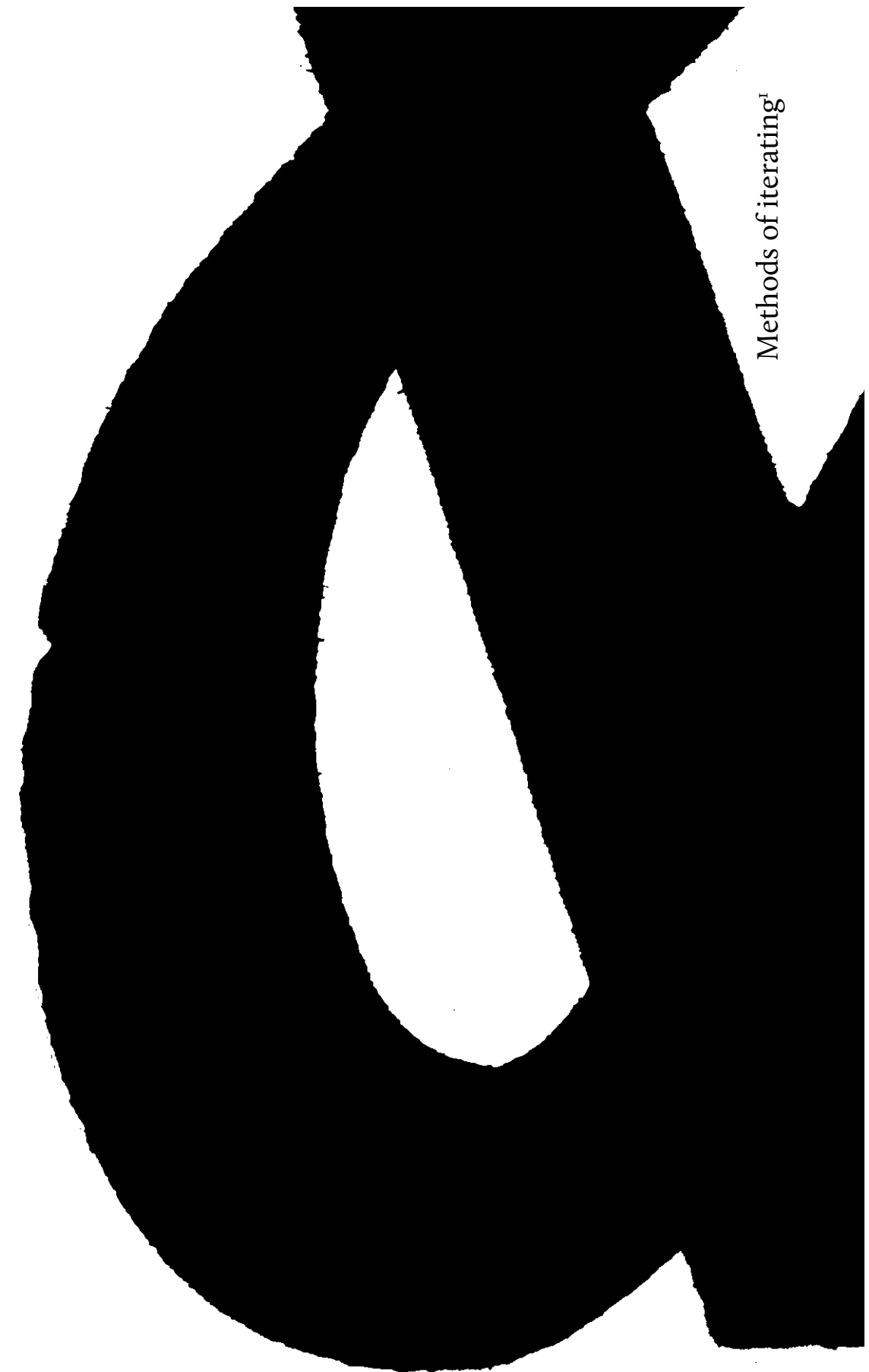
The experience has prompted me to ask:

*What happens if we focus on imperfection in letterpress?*

*Can these imperfections mirror those found in human relationships and even celebrate them?*

*Does type design outside of a digital space offer a richer creative experience for the designer?*

Based on these critical reflections of the tool, I propose 10-100 hand stamped iterations using combinations of 10 different ampersands. I will enlarge a selection of these combinations in order to explore and highlight their imperfections. In the spirit of adhocism, I will then collect imperfect combinations together in a group to evaluate their anthropomorphism. Can we see ourselves in them and how will they act as a group?



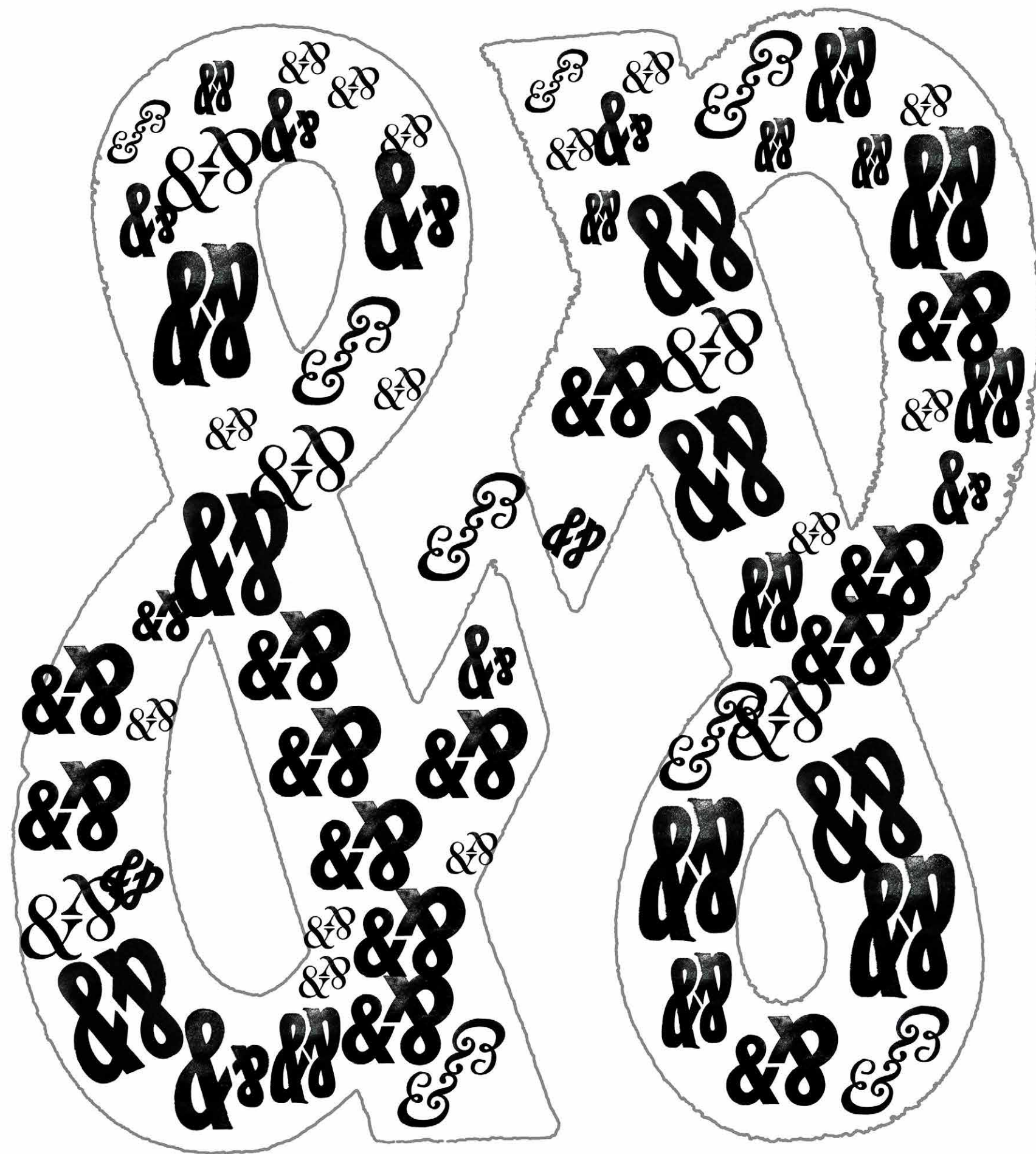
Methods of iterating¹

## References

Burrill, A. (2024) [anthonyburrill.com](https://anthonyburrill.com/showcase/you-have-the-answer/). Available at: <https://anthonyburrill.com/showcase/you-have-the-answer/> (Accessed: 20th January 2025).

Jencks, C. and Silver, N. (1972) *Adhocism; the Case for Improvisation*. First Edition. London: Secker and Warburg





One big print.  
Community  
Crossover



Transfer tattoo?  
What ampersand are you?